Church and Religion in the USSR

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РЕЛИГИЯ И ЦЕРКОВЬ В СССР

на английском языке

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What is the position of religion and the Church in the USSR? What are the relations between the State and the Church? What about freedom of conscience? What relevant legislation is there? These questions interest many of our readers abroad.

Far from oppressing the Church or preventing believers from practising their religion, Soviet legislation stipulates that any violation of the law through infringement of the rights of believers is a criminal offence. Thereby the law guarantees the implementation of the principle of freedom of conscience.

However, socialist democracy and the genuine freedom of the individual do not presuppose freedom from responsibility to society, from observance of the standards prevailing in socialist society.

Freedom of conscience is an inalienable part of the democratic rights and freedoms of citizens. As far as the attitude to religion is concerned, Marxism-Leninism regards freedom of conscience as the right of citizens freely to profess any faith, to change faith, to be a member of a religious body, as well as the right to profess no religion, to conduct anti-religious propaganda in any form, but without offending the religious feelings of believers.

This pamphlet describes the practical steps that have been taken since the inception of Soviet power to guarantee freedom of conscience in the USSR, and explains the democratic principles of Soviet legislation pertaining to church-state relations.

The Church in Russia Before the Revolution

The Russian Orthodox Church was the dominant, official religion in tsarist Russia. It was part of the state apparatus and exerted a tremendous influence on people's lives and on political and social life in general. It possessed enormous wealth including buildings, land, forests, commercial enterprises, etc. Besides, it received large subsidies from the State. In 1907, for instance, the government allocated 31 million roubles for the maintenance of the church apparatus—almost as much as it gave to the Ministry of Public Education.

The Russian Orthodox Church had far greater privileges than other religions. It enjoyed the exclusive right to propagate its doctrine and alone had the right of autonomy and was governed by the Holy Governing Synod headed by the chief procurator appointed by the tsar. The religious affairs of other faiths were under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Interior. All other Churches were only "tolerated" in Russia. Moreover, the followers of some religions were persecuted for their religious convictions.

Here are some excerpts from documents of the time.

On February 11, 1913 the Evangelical Christians of Libava (now Liepaja) wrote that "in Libava some persons have been dismissed from their jobs for

leaving the Orthodox faith for the Evangelical. Brother Kunitsky was fairly recently discharged from the railway service for leaving the Orthodox Church and, as a result, had to go to live in a village. Now Brother Petukhov has been given 24-hour notice from the port authorities who told him that he would not find employment anywhere. The reason Brother Petukhov was treated this way is his conversion from the Orthodox faith to that of Evangelical Christians . . ."

In the town of Kasimov in Ryazan Gubernia the chief of the 2nd division of the Oka Steamship Line dismissed Ivan Samokhvalov, an Evangelical Christian, who testified:

"I have worked as a landing-stage attendant on the Oka for fourteen years. And now, a few days ago I received a paper from the chief of the 2nd division saying that I shall be dismissed within seven days unless I go to confession and join the Orthodox Church. The reason for this was I was denounced by the parish priest and the acolyte."

And here is a petition from Zakhary Dotsenko, a peasant, to the Minister of Agriculture:

"In 1910, with the permission of both the local and resettlement authorities, I was registered as a resident in the settlement of Novo-Khersonka, Kopal District, Semirechye Region, and received a land allotment for my family which comprized four males and three females. But when I started building, the Novo-Khersonka headman forbade me to do so, giving as a reason the order of the Resettlement Inspector of the district.

"As Your Excellency will kindly see from the enclosed copies of letters of the resettlement authorities, the sole reason for this prohibition was that we are not Orthodox Christians, but Baptist sectarians of the Evangelical faith, one of whom, Fedot

Cherny, was elected headman. Upon the complaint of the diocesan authorities he has been suspended from office and we Baptists have been subjected to persecution and are being totally ruined financially."

As a rule, such petitions did not remain unanswered, but the answers were addressed to officials in the departments dealing with resettlement and not to the petitioners themselves. For example, a circular letter received by the resettlement inspector in Kopal District ordered him to report immediately how the settlement of Baptists had been permitted and, if the headman was really a Baptist, to remove him from office.

It goes without saying that high government posts could be held only by persons professing the Orthodox faith. The enrolment of the "heterodox" in educational establishments was limited. They were debarred from the civil service, while members of some religious communities were forbidden to live in specified localities. (There was, for instance, the "Pale" for Jews.)

The control of the Church over education was guarded by tsarism with special zeal. Almost one-half of all schools were directly in the hands of the Synod, and their principal task was "to instil in the children fear of God, love for the Church and devotion to the Tsar and the Fatherland". Religion was a compulsory subject in all educational establishments and the principal one in primary and parish schools.

Religion was forced on the students also in higher schools. It was stated, for example, in the "Instruction to the Director of Kazan University": "It shall be the paramount duty and strictest personal responsibility of the director to see to it and with the use of all the powers vested in him, that reverence and

love for the holy Evangelical doctrine are inculcated in all the students of the University."

"Shameful and accursed" were the epithets with which Lenin characterized the time when medieval, inquisitorial laws were in existence in Russia and were applied, persecuting men for their belief or disbelief, violating their consciences. [1] "These laws," he wrote, "either totally ban a certain religion, or prohibit its propagation, or deprive those who belong to it of certain rights. All these laws are as unjust, as arbitrary and as disgraceful as can be." [2]

Communists and the Church

The principles on which state-church relations are based in our country were elaborated by Lenin and the Communist Party long before the victory of the October Socialist Revolution of 1917.

It was stated in the Party Programme adopted by the 2nd Congress of the Party (July-August 1903): "The Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party sets as its immediate political task the overthrow of the tsarist autocracy and its replacement with a democratic republic the Constitution of which would ensure: ... 5. Unrestricted freedom of conscience, speech, the press, assembly, strikes and associations ... 7. Abolition of estates and full equality of all citizens irrespective of sex, religion, race or nationality ... 13. Separation of the Church from the State and of the school from the Church."

In his pamphlet "To the Rural Poor" (1903) Lenin stressed that the Communists demanded complete religious liberty, the right for every one not only to profess whatever religion he pleases, but also to

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1 See V. I. Lenin, *Coll. Works*, Vol. 10, p. 84.
2 *Ibid.*, Vol. 6, p. 404.

change his religion. There should be no "established" religion or church; all religions and all churches should have equal status in law.

When drafting documents of the Party's All-Russia Conference (April, 1917), Lenin supplemented the demand for the separation of the Church from the State and of the school from the Church with the provision that the democratic Russian republic should ensure that schools be "absolutely secular".

The programmatic demands of the Party and of the State as regards religion and the Church were formulated by Lenin in the article "Socialism and Religion" (1905): "Everyone must be absolutely free to profess any religion he pleases, or no religion whatever, i.e., to be an atheist, which every socialist is, as a rule. Discrimination among citizens on account of their religious convictions is wholly intolerable. Even the bare mention of a citizen's religion in official documents should unquestionably be eliminated." [1]

These demands began to acquire the force of law from the very first days of the Soviet State.

The Declaration of Rights of the Peoples of Russia, adopted in November 1917, abolished all and any national and religious privileges and restrictions, thereby putting an end to the unequal position of different Churches in the State and eliminating the survivals of serfdom, which were closely interwoven with religion. The policy of division of nations into "superior" and "inferior" and fomentation of strife between peoples on religious or national grounds was ruled out forever from the life of society.

On December 3, 1917, V. I. Lenin, Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars (the Soviet Go-

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[1] V. I. Lenin, *Coll. Works*, Vol. 10, p. 84.

vernment), signed the appeal "To all the Working Moslems of Russia and the East", which read, in part: "Moslems of Russia, Tatars of the Volga area and the Crimea, Kirghiz and Sarts of Siberia and Turkestan, Turks and Tatars of Transcaucasia, Chechens and mountaineers of the Caucasus, all those whose mosques and meeting-places were destroyed and whose beliefs and customs were trampled upon by the tsars and oppressors of Russia!

"Henceforth your beliefs and customs, your national and cultural institutions are declared free and inviolable."

Soviet power abolished once and for all infringement and restriction of the rights of the peoples of the national borderlands; specifically, it put an end to the attempts to force the Orthodox faith on them. The attitude of the Soviet Government to the performance of religious rites and services in the national borderlands of Russia was exemplified by the handing over to the Moslems of an extremely rare ancient manuscript, the Othman Koran, which had been removed by a tsarist general from a mosque in Central Asia. After the overthrow of the tsarist government and the victory of the February bourgeois revolution in Russia in 1917 Moslem soldiers attempted to get hold of the Koran, which was then kept in Petrograd, but were severely punished by the Provisional Government. After the establishment of Soviet power Moslems asked the Council of People's Commissars to return the Koran of Othman to them, and the government adopted a special decision, signed by Lenin: "Meeting the aspirations of all the Moslems of Russia, the Government has decided to hand over forthwith the Sacred Koran of Othman to them." Today this relic is kept in the library of the Moslem Board of Central Asia and Kazakhstan in Tashkent.

Soon afterward there followed the adoption of such government documents as the decision of the People's Commissariat for Education "On Transferring Management of the Affairs of Education from the Department of Religion to the People's Commissariat for Education", the decision on the abolition of the posts of teachers of religion of all denominations in secular educational establishments, the decrees "On the Dissolution of Marriage" and "On Civil Marriage, Children and Civil Registration" (December 18, 1917). The latter, without prohibiting marriages solemnized in Church, proclaimed that "Henceforth the Russian Republic recognizes only civil marriages". Juridical relations between spouses and between parents and children became independent of the Church. Legislation was enacted abolishing the state institutions in charge of the affairs of the clergy. In January 1918, for instance, the department of the court clergy and the army board of the department of religion were abolished, and a decree was issued discontinuing the allocation of budgetary means for the needs of religious faiths.

A Revolutionary Document

On January 23, 1918 the Council of People's Commissars adopted the decree "On the Separation of the Church from the State and of the School from the Church", which clearly defined the attitude of the Soviet State to religion and the Church.

It was stated in the decree that now every citizen could profess any religion or none at all. All restrictions on the rights of citizens because of confessing any religion, or of non-adherence to any faith, were abolished (Article 3).

The decree abolished religious vows and oaths

(Article 7), and religious rites and ceremonies in state and public organizations (Article 4). All civic registration functions were transferred to the civil authorities (Article 8). The religious rite or ceremony lost all legal force. For example, a church wedding did not ensure any longer protection by the laws of the State of the rights of the spouses, property rights, and the interests of the children. However, the State made an exception for marriages contracted prior to the publication of the civil laws on marriage and the family in the Soviet republics (December 20, 1917 in the Russian Federation; May 1, 1920 in Byelorussia; April 28, 1921 in Georgia, etc.). These marriages were made fully equal to civil marriages.

While granting citizens the right freely to determine their attitude to religion, the decree forbade the Church to punish parishioners for apostasy or to convert people by force (Article 11).

The decree anchored in law the democratic concept of equality of all religions before the law. Moreover, any reference to the religion or lack of religion of citizens in official documents was categorically prohibited.

From then on all ecclesiastical and religious associations were to submit to the general ordinances concerning societies and associations. All of them ceased to enjoy any privileges they had been granted by the State and to receive any financial assistance from it (Article 10).

The establishment of equality of religions accorded first of all with the aspirations of the peoples of the national borderlands of Russia. Obviously, any restriction on all religions other than the state (Orthodox) religion in tsarist Russia was an infringement of the rights and an insult to the feelings of the national minorities. While the decree was being

drafted Lenin called repeatedly for an especially circumspect and thoughtful approach to religious matters in the national areas.

The decree prohibited the issue of any local laws or ordinances which would hinder or restrict freedom of conscience, enjoyed equally by all citizens (Article 2).

The separation of the school from the Church meant that the Church would not be permitted to interfere in the education of the younger generation and pupils would not be forced to study religion. As Marx pointed out, the removal of the religious and clerical element from education is the beginning of the mental emancipation of the people.

Implementing the decree on the separation of the school from the Church, the People's Commissariat for Education and the State Commission for Education ordered the discontinuation of the teaching of religion in all state, public and private educational establishments which were under the jurisdiction of the commissariat, and the abolition of the posts of instructors in religion and the performance of all religious rites in schools.

All these measures fully applied to the schools of the national minorities. A unified school system was established in the country, based on the ideology of the working-class state. The educational establishments which had been in the hands of the clergy became secular.

The decree "On the Separation of the Church from the State and the School from the Church" formalized the principles of relations between the Soviet State and the Church. The freedom of conscience proclaimed in it was reaffirmed in the Soviet Constitution, in which Article 124 reads: "The Church in the USSR shall be separated from the State, and the school from the Church to ensure

freedom of conscience for all citizens. Freedom of religious worship and of anti-religious propaganda shall be recognized for all citizens."

The Clergy and Counter-Revolution

The Church, which became the rallying centre of the openly reactionary, pro-monarchy forces, vehemently resisted revolutionary transformations. It declared its hostile attitude to the Soviet State at the Local Council of the Russian Orthodox Church which was in session from August 1917 to October 1918.

The Local Council adopted an appeal to the clergy and all believers declaring the socialist revolution to be an "invasion of the Antichrist and raging godlessness". The Council restored the Patriarchate. [1] Metropolitan Tikhon of Moscow (V. Belavin) was elected Patriarch.

He began to perform his duties by embarking on an open counter-revolutionary campaign. In his message to the Orthodox clergy and all believers on January 19, 1918 Tikhon anathematized Soviet power, "adjured" "all the loyal children of the Orthodox Church of Christ" not to enter into "any fellowship" with Communists, urged "believers and loyal children of the Church" to rise in defence of the "humiliated and oppressed" Orthodox Church, "to suffer for the cause of Christ", and commanded all ranks of the clergy "not to waste a single hour" in organizing spiritual alliances and calling parishion-

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[1] The church reform carried out by Peter the Great in 1721 abolished the institution of Patriarchate. Control over church affairs was placed in the hands of a state official, the chief procurator. It was only after the fall of the tsarist monarchy and the separation of the Church from the State that the Patriarchate was restored in the Russian Orthodox Church.

ers to join "the ranks of spiritual fighters who will counter the external force with the forces of their holy inspiration". He sent his blessing and holy bread to the overthrown emperor.

An extremely reactionary role was played by the Church in the years of the civil war and the intervention of fourteen foreign states against Soviet Russia. Clergymen of almost all denominations joined the forces of internal and external reaction in actively opposing the power of the working people.

The church press called upon the believers to volunteer for the White armies without waiting for the mobilization order. Vast numbers of leaflets and proclamations were issued by the Patriarch, the Synod and diocesan administrations. In the autumn of 1918, on the eve of the liberation of Kazan from the counter-revolutionaries' troops, Metropolitan Iakov of Kazan and Sviyazhsk signed a proclamation saying, "All who can carry weapons, join the people's army forthwith, enlist in volunteer regiments without hesitation and fear. Hurry into the battle: save our sacred relics from desecration, the city from destruction, the inhabitants from extermination."

In the same year the clergy of the Siberian city of Tomsk issued an appeal, "To all the Children of the Orthodox Church", urging them to support the White Guard [1] government in its struggle against the Soviet government. The Trans-Baikal Diocese sent an appeal to Japan in April 1920, declaring that the servants of the Orthodox Church and its loyal sons hailed Japan's invasion as a step aimed at protecting and defending the essence of the life of the Russian people—the faith of the fathers—

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[1] The White Guard—armed detachments of counter-revolutionaries who fought against Soviet power.

against persecution and oppression. In 1919 a Church Council held at Stavropol published counter-revolutionary appeals and messages and organized a "Provisional Supreme Church Authority in the South-East of Russia", which subsequently became an organizing centre of religious counter-revolution.

Not a single anti-Soviet uprising organized by counter-revolutionaries passed without the assistance or direct participation of members of the clergy. In July 1918, with the blessing of the Orthodox Church, a White Guard insurrection started in Yaroslavl. Church officials were in close touch with representatives of the largest counter-revolutionary organizations "Tactical Centre" and "National Centre", which were preparing an insurrection in the autumn of 1919 and nurturing plans for seizing Moscow and Petrograd and assassinating Lenin and other government and Party leaders.

The White Guard forces had every reason to regard the clergy as one of their detachments legally existing on the territory of Soviet Russia.

Monasteries often served as bases of support for the counter-revolutionaries. Former tsarist officers found asylum in them. Stocks of weapons and ammunition were often stored on their grounds. A prison for captured Bolshevik underground fighters and partisans was set up on one of the White Sea islands belonging to the Solovetsky Monastery.

Priests and monks often operated as agents in the Red Army's rear. In August 1919 a vagrant monk was arrested in the village of Ilovaiskaya in the south-eastern Ukraine. On him was found a document containing the following order: "All priests and deans of Orthodox churches are instructed to assist Brother Iliodor, hieromonk, in organizing in Bolshevik-occupied villages committees for the destruction of the said apostates, and to supply

him with all information about the location of the enemy."

Thousands of churchmen operated in the White Guard armies. There were about 1,000 priests in Denikin's army, more than 500 in Wrangel's and several thousand in Kolchak's. [1] In addition to their religious duties regimental priests were expected to organize counter-revolutionary agitation and spy on soldiers. Priests received detailed instructions from their superiors and acted jointly with counter-revolutionary officers.

"Regiments of Jesus" and "of the Holy Virgin" were formed in Siberia under the supervision of Bishop Silvestr of Omsk and of British General Alfred Knox. Such regiments operated also in the south. During hostilities Soviet units often captured armed members of the clergy, and when Red Army men retreated, churchmen machine-gunned them from bell towers.

A disgraceful page was added to the history of the Russian Orthodox Church by Patriarch Tikhon and his associates with their actions during the great national disaster, the famine in the Volga area, when the lives of millions of people had to be saved and all the country's resources mobilized to provide starving people with bread. Groups of believers appealed to the Church to help the famine-stricken regions. In January 1922 a parish meeting in the village of Davydovka of Melitopol District resolved to donate the gold and silver plate of the local church to the relief fund. In February a similar decision was taken by a meeting of the parishioners

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[1] Anton Denikin, a general in the tsar's army; Baron Pyotr Wrangel, a general in the tsar's army, and Alexander Kolchak, an admiral in the tsar's navy, were leaders of the Russian counter-revolution.

of churches in Nizhny Novgorod (now Gorky). "Awake, servants of the Church," they declared. "Let it be known to you that the Faith is perishing, not through the Bolsheviks' fault, but because of your hypocrisy. Remember that if you do not launch a crusade against the tsar-hunger, you will cover yourselves forever with indelible shame."

However, Patriarch Tikhon paid no heed to such appeals. And on February 28 he called on the clergy and believers to hide church valuables. He stated frankly in secret instructions to the clergy: "What is important is not what you give, but to whom you give."

It is appropriate to recall here that during the First World War the Orthodox Church had shown its complete willingness to help the prosecution of the war with all the valuables at its disposal: "Should the State and Church authorities ask, decide or command, the Church and the cloisters will without delay, hesitation or regret give the copper of our bells, the gold, the silver, the jewels of our icons, crosses and vestments . . . to the needs of the war."

After the revolution at the demand of the popular masses those who had actively participated in and organized counter-revolutionary activities were put on trial. Among them were prelates, rank-and-file clergymen and heads of parish communities. They were tried not for religious, but for political, anti-state activity. Members of the clergy themselves were compelled to admit this. In 1942 Metropolitan Sergius Stragorodsky, who subsequently became the Patriarch, declared: "After the October Revolution, trials of many churchmen took place in Russia. Why were these members of the clergy put on trial? Solely because they used their cassocks and church banners to hide behind while carrying on anti-Soviet work. Those were political trials, having nothing in

common with the purely ecclesiastical life of religious organizations and the purely ecclesiastical activity of individual priests."

The Patriarch Repents

Early in May 1922, after his activities against the people had been exposed, Patriarch Tikhon was brought to trial. He was tried not only for his appeal of February 28, 1922, which had caused unrest leading to bloodshed and loss of life, but also for many other anti-Soviet actions.

Many churchmen realized that the counter-revolutionary activity of the church leadership was undermining the authority of the Orthodox Church and its influence among the masses. On May 12, 1922 delegates of an influential religious trend called *Obnovlenchestvo* (Renovation) with Archpriest Vvedensky at the head visited Tikhon and demanded his resignation. The Renovators condemned the Church's hostile attitude to the Soviet State. In a letter printed in the newspaper *Izvestia* on May 14, 1922, they called for an end to the "civil war of the Church against the State" led by the church authorities, and an immediate convocation of the Local Council of the Russian Orthodox Church "to judge those responsible for the disintegration of the Church", decide the question of church administration, and establish normal relations between the Church and Soviet power.

After lengthy consideration Patriarch Tikhon declared that he would give up his anti-Soviet activities. "I deem it the duty of my pastoral conscience," he wrote to the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, "to state the following. Having been brought up in a monarchic society, and being influenced,

until my arrest, by anti-Soviet-minded persons, I truly was hostile to Soviet power . . . With the exception of a few minor errors, the indictment of the Supreme Court sums up all my anti-Soviet actions. Acknowledging the correctness of the decision of the Court . . . I repent of my crimes against the state system and request the Supreme Court to discontinue my isolation, that is, to release me from arrest. At the same time I declare to the Supreme Court that from now on I am not an enemy of Soviet power. I renounce, irrevocably and finally, both the foreign and internal monarchist White Guardist counter-revolution." (*Izvestia*, June 27, 1923).

Patriarch Tikhon was released before he had served his sentence. Subsequently Tikhon made repeated statements of his loyalty to the Soviet State.

On April 7, 1925, Tikhon died, leaving a testament for his flock in which he admitted that from the very outset Soviet power had ensured complete freedom of conscience. "Back in January 1918, after they took over the government of the Russian state, representatives of Soviet power issued a decree on the complete freedom of citizens to profess any faith and to live according to it. Thus, the principle of freedom of conscience proclaimed by them ensures to every religious society, our Orthodox Church included, rights and possibilities to live and to conduct their ecclesiastical affairs in conformity with the demands of their faith, in so far as this does not violate order and the rights of other citizens." Tikhon advised believers "not to cherish hopes for a return of the monarchic system and to satisfy themselves that Soviet power is truly a people's, workers' and peasants' power, and therefore firm and unshakable . . . to condemn any resistance to this power, evil designs, sedition against it and all hostility towards it . . . to bring before the court of the Orthodox

Council those who persist in their delusions and refuse to repent of them before Soviet power." In his testament Tikhon also decried the activities of the émigré clergy: "Using our name, our clerical authority, they conduct harmful and counter-revolutionary activity there. We declare resolutely: we have no connection with them, contrary to our enemies' assertions; they are alien to us, we condemn their harmful activity."

Were Patriarch Tikhon's repentance and testament sincere? On April 15, 1925 *Izvestia* reported that in his last days Tikhon had been surrounded only by his devoted followers, Orthodox Church officials, pro-Tikhon clergymen. There could be no question of any pressure on his conscience. The testament had been drawn up by him absolutely independently and freely and handed by him to his closest assistant, Metropolitan Pyotr, several hours before his death for the express purpose of having it published. A person making such a testament on his death-bed is unlikely to be guilty of hypocrisy.

Loyalty of the Church

As socialist construction progressed and the Soviet State grew stronger, the clergy was confronted with a dilemma: either to deprive themselves, once and for all, of the support of believers, or to recognize Soviet power. Under the pressure of their flock the heads of the overwhelming majority of religious faiths declared their loyalty to the Soviet State.

The Soviet State's and Communist Party's policy in relation to religion played its part in causing the Church to adopt this position. In the most trying years of the civil war and foreign military intervention the principles of freedom of conscience were

undeviatingly implemented in the country. The 8th Party Congress (1919) stressed in a resolution that "persons encroaching upon freedom of faith and worship for citizens of all religious beliefs must be strictly punished". It was pointed out in the resolution of the 13th Congress (1924) "On Work in the Countryside": "It is necessary to cut short resolutely all attempts to combat religious prejudices by administrative means such as the closure of churches, mosques, synagogues, prayer-houses, etc . . . Special care must be taken not to offend the religious feelings of the believer . . ."

The policy which took into consideration the interests of the believers helped to strengthen the confidence of the working people in the Communist Party and the Soviet State.

This process was further activated under Metropolitan Sergius, locum tenens of the Patriarch. On July 29, 1927, Metropolitan Sergius and six members of the Synod issued a declaration in which they wrote: "We Church officials are not on the side of the enemies of our Soviet State and the senseless instruments of their intrigues, but on the side of our people and our government . . . We regard any blow directed against the Soviet Union, be it war, boycott or any public disaster or secret murder . . . as a blow directed against us. In order to put an end to this we have demanded that the clergy abroad give a written pledge of complete loyalty to the Soviet Government in all their public activity. Those who fail to give such a pledge or violate it shall be expelled from the clergy under the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate." The majority of the priesthood approved the declaration and displayed readiness to support the home and foreign policies of the Soviet Government. This brought about an improvement in the relations between the Church and the State.

A Sacred Duty

The Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945 was a grave trial for the Soviet people. Its first days, when the Red Army had to retreat under the pressure of the superior forces of the enemy, were especially tragic.

Both at the front and deep in the interior, as well as on temporarily occupied territories, Soviet people demonstrated their indomitable will for victory.

The Church did not remain on the sidelines. On the first day of the war Metropolitan Sergius, locum tenens of the Patriarch, issued a message to the clergy and believers reflecting the sentiments of the nationwide patriotic upsurge: "The fascistic brigands have attacked our Motherland. Trampling upon all treaties and promises, they have come down suddenly upon us, and now the blood of our citizens is already flowing on our soil... But it is not the first time that the Russian people have had to withstand such trials. This time, too, with God's help they will reduce the fascist enemy to dust. Our forefathers did not quail even under worse circumstances, because they remembered, not their personal danger or benefits, but their sacred duty to the Motherland and the faith, and emerged victorious."

On July 26, 1941 another prominent dignitary of the Russian Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Alexius of Leningrad (the future Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia), who remained in beleaguered Leningrad throughout the siege, addressed believers among the soldiers in the field with the following appeal: "War is a sacred cause for those who undertake it from necessity, in defence of truth and the Motherland. In this case those who take up arms perform an exploit of righteousness and, in accepting wounds and suffer-

ing, and laying down their lives for their kinsmen and their country, follow in the footsteps of the martyrs. Therefore the Church blesses these exploits and everything a Russian is doing to defend the Motherland . . . The Church calls incessantly upon all to defend our Motherland. Full of faith in God's help to the right cause, it prays for complete and final victory over the enemy."

Joining in the nationwide patriotic movement, the Russian Orthodox Church organized the collection of offerings for the needs of the front. For instance, the Alexander Nevsky air squadron and the Dmitry Donskoi tank unit were built with funds contributed by the clergy and ordinary believers. In September 1942 a council of bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church adopted an appeal to the Christians of all the world calling upon them to unite their efforts in the struggle against the Nazi invaders.

Similar activities were launched by the majority of representatives of other religions. The Central Moslem Board of the USSR addressed all Soviet Moslems over the radio: "The fascists have drenched our peaceful fields with blood. They are killing innocent children, women and old people. Hitler intends to destroy science and culture, to establish a kingdom of barbarity and to exterminate the Moslem faith. The Central Moslem Board of the USSR calls upon all the faithful to defend their native land."

These patriotic acts were duly appreciated by the Soviet Government. Many church leaders received government decorations.

Then came the years of peaceful construction. The country was healing its war wounds and rehabilitating its ravaged economy. Together with all the progressive forces of the world the Soviet people launched a far-reaching movement against those trying to instigate a new war. The Church supported this

movement. Patriarch Alexius [1] devoted much time to the activity of such international organizations as the Christian Movement for Peace, the World Council of Churches, the Conference of European Churches, and others. In recognition of his activity in defence of peace the Soviet Government awarded him several orders and medals.

In the postwar period all the major faiths and denominations (with the exception of some sectarian organizations) began to show, just as the Orthodox Church, greater loyalty to the Soviet State. The Moslem, Buddhist, Judaic, Georgian, Armenian, Roman-Catholic, Old-Believers', Evangelical-Lutheran, Evangelical Christian-Baptist and other Churches and religions came out actively in support of the socialist system and the internal and foreign policy of the Soviet Government.

This tendency could be seen during major ecclesiastical activities such as the Local Council of the Russian Orthodox Church, the All-Union Congress of the Evangelical Christians-Baptists, the Council of the Old-Believers' Church, the Council of the Georgian Orthodox Church, or the Congress of the Moslems of the Northern Caucasus.

The Soviet Government's message of greetings to the Local Council of the Russian Orthodox Church in May 1971 said: "The Russian Orthodox Church and its clergy have in the course of many years displayed political loyalty to the Soviet State, supported the internal and foreign policy of the Government, and come out actively against the threat of a new war. The relations between the State and the Church are quite normal."

The Synod of the Moscow Patriarchate wrote in a letter to the Council for Religious Affairs: "The

[1] Elected by the Local Council of the Russian Orthodox Church in January 1945 after the death of Patriarch Sergius.

Local Council of our Church has unanimously reaffirmed its love for and devotion to our Motherland, to its Government, which pursues a policy of peace conforming to the vital interests of all citizens of our country, which accords also with the interests of our Church, of its hierarchy, clergy and believers.

"We can testify that the Local Council of our Church has been marked by a patriotic tone, and that the members of the Council, citizens of our State, have demonstrated a high civic spirit, love for our Motherland and a striving to serve tirelessly the ideals of peace, progress and friendship among peoples."

The Russian Orthodox Church is working actively in behalf of peace. Patriarch Pimen [1] took the initiative in convening the world conference "Religious Workers for Lasting Peace, Disarmament and Just Relations Among Nations", to be held in Moscow in 1977. The Preparatory Committee of the conference consists of representatives of the Christians, Moslems, Shintoists, Buddhists and Judaists of 29 countries of Europe, Asia, Africa and America. Metropolitan Yuvenaly of Tula and Belev has been elected Chairman of the Committee.

20,000 Houses of Worship

There function in the USSR more than 20,000 Russian Orthodox, Old-Believers', Georgian, Armenian, Roman-Catholic and Lutheran churches, Jewish synagogues, Buddhist monasteries, prayer-houses of the Evangelical Christians-Baptists and Seventh-Day Adventists, etc., and 19 monasteries and convents of the Russian Orthodox Church.

State agencies provide religious organizations with

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1 Enthroned by the Local Council in 1971.

printing facilities, paper and everything necessary for printing religious publication such as the Bible, the Koran, theological works, prayer-books, journals and church calendars. This is simply one of the ways in which freedom of conscience is given the material support needed to maintain it.

The Russian Orthodox Church issues six periodicals and regularly puts out prayer-books. Over the past years the Bible has been printed twice in mass editions. In addition, in 1976 a jubilee edition of the Bible appeared to mark the 100th anniversary of the first Bible put out in Russian (instead of Church Slavonic). The New Testament and the works of the late Patriarch Alexius (in four volumes) have also been published. Preparation is under way for the publication of the works of Patriarch Pimen of Moscow and All Russia.

The Koran has been published twice, and a new edition is to be printed soon. The Moslem lunar calendar and the journal *Moslems of the Soviet East* (in Arabic, English, French and Uzbek) are issued regularly. The jubilee of the famous Moslem theologian and scholar, al-Bukhari, was marked by the publication of his book *Kitab al-Jami' al-Sahih* in two volumes.

Since the end of the war there have appeared dozens of full-length and short films describing the activities of major denominations.

The Churches have, in all, 39 enterprises for making church-plate and other religious objects, candles, matzoh, etc., with the necessary raw materials and other supplies provided by the state on a planned basis.

The Soviet State does not interfere with the establishment of theological schools. There are 18 such schools at present, among them six Orthodox academies and seminaries, two Roman-Catholic seminaries,

a Moslem academy and a madrasah, a Jewish yeshiva, an academy of the Armenian Church and a seminary of the Georgian Church. Those who cannot study at regular schools can add to their theological knowledge at correspondence courses and at the correspondence departments of regular theological schools.

The schools have all the necessary facilities for the normal process of instruction. For instance, the Leningrad Orthodox Theological Academy has about 200,000 volumes of theological literature in many languages. The Moscow theological schools receive on subscription more than 80 newspapers and journals. The organization of the teaching process and internal regimen in the theological schools is the prerogative of the religious bodies themselves.

In addition to daily classes, theological schools organize lectures on the international situation or the latest achievements of science and technology, exhibitions devoted to specific subjects on the occasion of outstanding events and anniversaries, and reviews of religious and secular films.

The Main Faiths and Denominations

Soviet law stipulates that citizens who are believers and who have reached the age of 18 years, have the right to unite in religious associations or groups (depending on the numbers involved) and to practise their religion as they require.

The law states that voluntary membership must be a basic principle of a religious association. Every citizen may join or leave a religious association only of his own free will.

Believers who have formed a religious association (community or group) in the legally recognized manner have the right to perform religious rites together and hold prayer meetings and ceremonies

for the purpose of worship; they may elect or employ priests or ministers, make use of and manage places of worship and church property, collect donations in the place of worship to maintain the building and the church property, and for the upkeep of the clergy, and to meet any other expenses necessary for the practice of their religion.

Church funds consisting of voluntary offerings made by church members are not taxable.

At their general meeting believers elect an executive body and an auditing commission to administer the affairs of their religious association, its property and funds, and also to represent the community abroad. From time to time, religious associations, on their own initiative, convene national congresses and conferences in order to settle inter-church questions, elect governing centres etc.

These centres supervise over inter-church canonical affairs on the basis of the rules and regulations adopted at the congresses and conferences of believers.

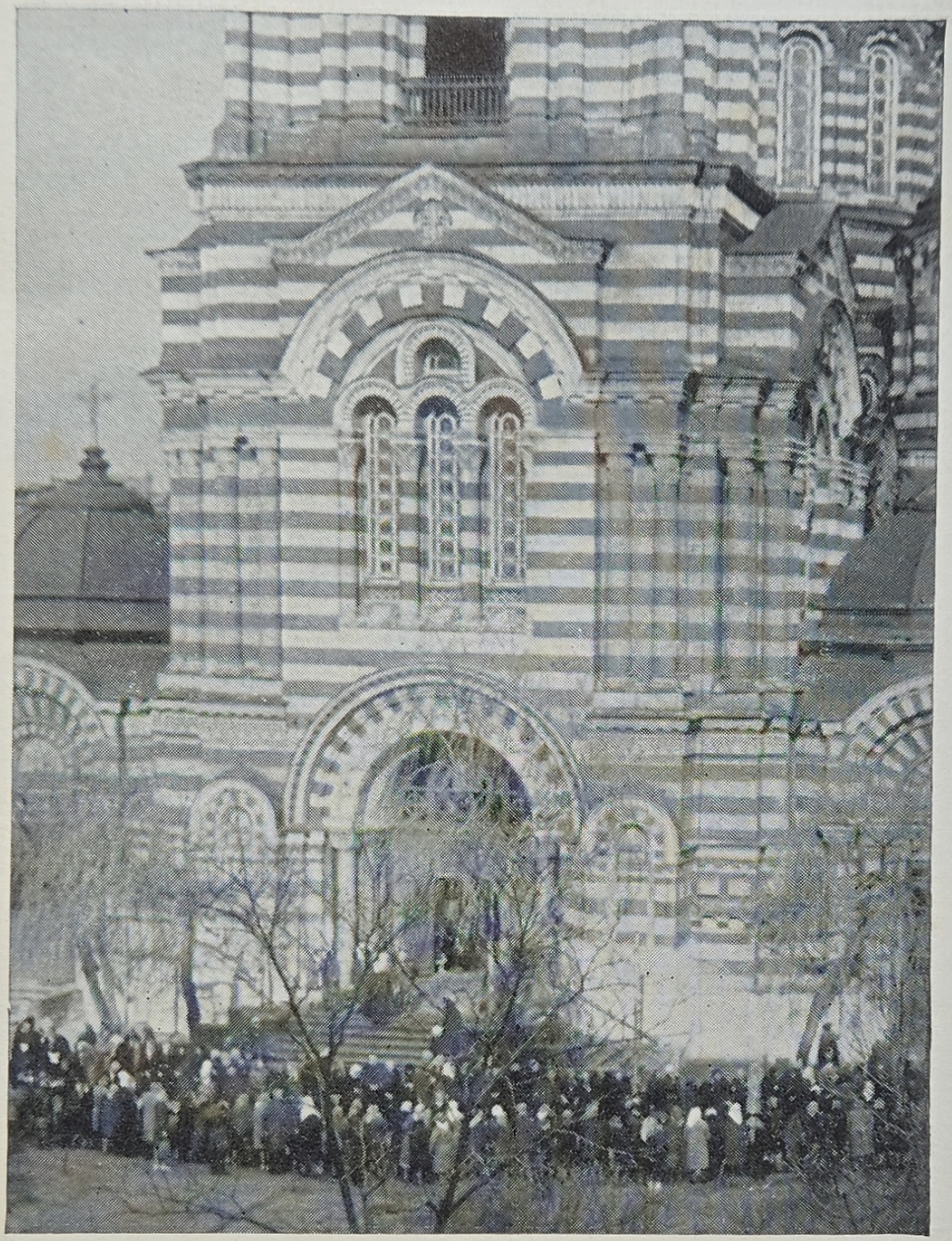
There are a number of religious centres and other bodies in charge of religious affairs in the USSR.

The Russian Orthodox Church is governed by the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia together with the Synod. In order to settle important ecclesiastical questions, the Patriarch convenes a Council of Bishops or a Local Council over which he presides. On behalf of the Russian Orthodox Church, the Patriarch maintains relations with the heads of other autocephalous Orthodox Churches. He instructs bishops in matters concerning the spiritual and canonical activity of religious associations, confers titles and marks of distinction on clergy and is also in charge of theological schools.

The Russian Orthodox Church is divided into 76 dioceses headed by metropolitans, archbishops and

Patriarch Pimen of Moscow and All Russia was enthroned by a Local Council in 1971.

A Local Council in session in the Trinity-Saint Sergius Monastery in Zagorsk.



Before a liturgy at the Cathedral of the Annunciation at Kharkhov in the Ukraine.

Russian Orthodox Church ceremonies: top—Christmas Eve at the Patriarchal Cathedral of the Epiphany (Yelokhovsky); below—a wedding ceremony.

The consecration of the chrism at the Armenian Church.

An Arabic lesson in the lingaphone room of the Moslem school in Tashkent.

A Moslem conference was held in 1976 in Samarkand, the Uzbek Republic, to mark the 1200-year jubilee of Al-Bukhari.

A service at the mosque in Ufa, the Bashkir Autonomous Republic.

A service in progress in the Roman-Catholic Cathedral in Kaunas, the Lithuanian Republic.

Services are held three or four times a week at Baptist churches in the Soviet Union.

The Moscow Choral Synagogue is in Arkhipov Street in the very heart of Moscow.

The Judaic holiday, Sukkoth, lasts for 9 days. The last day of Sukkoth marks the beginning of the annual cycle of reading the Torah in the synagogue.

The Ivolginsky Monastery, the Buddhist centre of the Soviet Union, is located 30 kilometres from Ulan-Ude, capital of the Buriat Autonomous Republic.

Lamas' procession around the Ivolginsky Monastery.

Members of the international preparatory committee of the conference of religious workers "For Lasting Peace, Disarmament and Just Relations Among Nations".

bishops. A diocese consists of deaneries led by a dean who supervises the work and conduct of the parish clergy who are the spiritual leaders of the religious communities (parishes). The Moscow Patriarchate is also in charge of many Russian Orthodox parishes abroad—in France, the United States, the Federal Republic of Germany, Britain, Argentina, Canada and other countries. These have been placed under the supervision of exarchates, dioceses, deaneries and missions.

Islam is the second largest body of believers after the Russian Orthodox Church.

Although most Moslems in the USSR are Sunnites, there are also some Shiites. There are four independent bodies controlling their religious affairs: the Moslem Board of Central Asia and Kazakhstan in Tashkent, capital of the Uzbek Republic; the Moslem Board of the European USSR and Siberia in Ufa, capital of the Bashkir Autonomous Republic, the Moslem Board of the Northern Caucasus in Buinaksk in the Daghestan Autonomous Republic, and the Moslem Board of Transcaucasia in Baku, capital of the Azerbaijan Republic. The Moslem Boards are elected by assemblies of representatives of the communities.

Mosques are the centres of the religious life of Moslem communities. There the faithful offer up daily prayers and Friday prayers and hold religious celebrations.

Moslem holidays, especially Uraza Bairam and Kurban Bairam, are marked with great festivity, when thousands of Moslems gather in mosques. For example, over five thousand Moslems usually come to the Moscow mosque for the service during Uraza Bairam and Kurban Bairam, while as many as ten thousand gather at Tilla-shaykh, one of the cathedral mosques in Tashkent, on these days.

Moslems in the Soviet Union perform absolutely freely all the rites of their faith, such as name-giving, circumcision, and wedding or funeral rites. It is customary for certain rites to be accompanied by festivities in the homes of the faithful. For example, the head of a family arranges big celebrations to mark the birth of a child, the name-giving, etc. Moslem weddings in believers' families are held in strict accordance with Islamic custom and take the form of festivals for the bride and groom, their relatives and friends.

Moslems in the USSR are also able to carry out hajj, which is one of a Moslem's chief duties, and each year groups of Moslems from the Soviet Union go on a pilgrimage to Mecca. They also visit the grave of the Prophet Mohammed in Medina and other places of historical importance to Islam.

One of the specific features of the Moslem faith is the mazar cult, the worship of the graves of Moslem saints and prominent Islamic figures. Mausoleums have been erected at different times over the graves of outstanding Moslems in Central Asia, Azerbaijan, the Northern Caucasus and other places. Governing Moslem bodies appoint sheiks as permanent keepers of the mazars. For instance, the Moslem Board of Central Asia and Kazakhstan is in charge of the tomb of Kusamm ibn-Abbas (a cousin of the Prophet Mohammed) and Pavlen-Ata's mausoleum in Uzbekistan, the mausoleum of Hajji Yusuf Khamadani in Tajikistan, Sultan-baba's tomb in Karakalpakia and many other monuments which are architectural masterpieces.

Moslem spiritual leaders in the Soviet Union are trained in madrasahs and further their religious education at Islamic academies.

The term of training at a madrasah is seven years. Islamic spiritual leaders may continue their

theological studies abroad. In the last few years many Moslems from the Soviet Union have attended courses at Al Azhar University in Cairo and at Al Quarawiyin University in Morocco.

The well-stocked libraries of the mosques are being constantly replenished, as are Moslems' private libraries. Each Moslem Board regularly issues Islamic calendars and from time to time publishes Shari'a edicts of the muftis and instructions and explanations on various religious matters for the divines and the faithful.

Buddhists in the USSR live mostly in the Buriat, Kalmyk and Tuva Autonomous Republics and in some districts of the Chita and Irkutsk Regions of the Russian Federation. The Central Buddhist Board of the USSR is headed by Bandido-Khambo Lama Gamboyev Jambal-Dorji.

A new Buddhist temple has been built in the Ivolginsky monastery in the Buriat Autonomous Republic. Buddhists from many districts of the republic gather there on religious holidays.

"It was an impressive spectacle. Thousands of Buddhists gathered for the festivities and stayed for the day and the night. . ." wrote N. Jinaratana Maha Nayaka Thero, a prominent Buddhist leader of India, in the magazine *The Maha Bodhi.*

"In the monastery we watched a giant procession, stretching for two miles, consisting of Buddhists dressed in the colourful garments of Mongolian lamas. The believers brought great quantities of different foodstuffs, fruits and vegetables."

Among the duties of the lamas living in the monastery are the organization and conduct of Buddhist holidays and participation in daily services and regularly organized theological discussions. They also visit areas far away from the monastery to perform religious rites at the request of believers.

A Higher Buddhist Institute was opened in 1970 by Soviet and Mongolian Buddhists. It is attended by young people from Buddhist families of the Soviet Union and the Mongolian People's Republic. They study subjects concerned with Buddhist teaching and philosophy, learn sacred texts and master the Tibetan language and several modern languages. Some of the students show a particular interest in Tibetan medicine.

Armenian believers living in the Soviet Union and abroad all belong to the Armenian Church. Some of its communities are located in dioceses abroad where Armenians emigrated before the Great October Socialist Revolution. The Church is headed by the Supreme Patriarch-Catholicos of All Armenians who resides at Echmiadzin, the ancient Armenian religious centre located near Yerevan, capital of the Armenian Republic. The dioceses of the Armenian Church abroad are headed by archbishops and bishops.

The Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists was formed in 1944 by the union of Baptists and Evangelists. In 1945 they were joined by some of the Pentecostalist communities and later by Mennonite communities.

Services in Baptist churches in the USSR are held three or four times a week. The Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists is headed by the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists. This council is elected at congresses and has its headquarters in Moscow. Current affairs are conducted by the Presidium of the All-Union Council presided over by a chairman.

The Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists publishes the bi-monthly journal, *Bratsky Vestnik* (Brotherly Herald), and calendars, prayer-books and

hymnals. Theological literature is put out in Russian, Estonian, Lettish and German.

Baptist ministers are trained at courses for Bible study. Some of them attend foreign colleges.

Alexei Bychkov, General Secretary of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, said at a press conference: "Evangelical Christians-Baptists are equal citizens of the USSR and ardent patriots. Many of our brothers and sisters came back from the war with decorations for their valour. One of them is the Muscovite, I. I. Shatalin, who is a Hero of the Soviet Union.

"Many of the members of our Church have been awarded high government decorations for their work. For example, Sister M. I. Mikhailenko, who worked at tea plantations in Georgia, was a Hero of Socialist Labour (she died in 1975). The honoured title, 'Merited Farmer,' has been conferred on Brother G. R. Yantsen, a farmer from the Kirghiz Republic and chairman of the Executive Council of the Leninpol Community."

An All-Union Congress of Evangelical Christians-Baptists was held in Moscow in December, 1974. The congress stated in a telegramme to the Soviet Government that "the Evangelical Christians-Baptists will continue praying for the blessing of the Government's further efforts towards strengthening universal peace and will work to promote the advancement of their Motherland".

The parishes of the **Roman-Catholic Church** in ten out of the fifteen Union Republics of the Soviet Union are united in separate, independent religious departments, or curias. In the Lithuanian Republic, for example, the Roman-Catholic parishes are governed by six religious centres: the Vilnius Archdiocese and the Panevežys, Telšiai, Kaunas, Kaišiadorys and Vilkaviškis dioceses. In the Latvian Re-

public the Roman-Catholic parishes are in charge of the Riga Archdiocese of the Roman-Catholic Church. In Transcarpathia there is a Vicariate of the Roman-Catholic Church in the city of Uzhgorod of the Ukrainian Republic.

The curias conduct the religious affairs of parishes, appoint and replace priests, etc. The heads of curias, appointed by the Vatican, regularly carry out canonical visits to the parishes and generally supervise their activities.

There are in the Soviet Union three independent centres of the **Lutherans** (the Augsburg Church) which are called consistories. In Estonia and Latvia they are headed by archbishops and in Lithuania, by a chairman-president. The centre leaders are elected at General Synods attended by representatives of the clergy and the believers. The religious associations of Methodists, residing mostly in the Estonian Republic, are controlled by the Council of the Church, which elects the Superintendent of the Methodist Church.

The Lithuanian Republic and the Transcarpathian Region of the Ukrainian Republic have communities of the **Reformed Church**, which are directed by a consistory in Lithuania and the Reformed Church Department in the Transcarpathian Region.

The **Old Believers** were granted full equality under Soviet government and have been functioning on an equal footing with the Russian Orthodox Church and other Churches.

The Old Believers' Church came into being in the second half of the 17th century when several religious groups separated from the official Russian Orthodox Church in protest against church reforms. The three basic divisions of the Old Believers which are still in existence are the Popovtsi, the Beglopopovtsi, and the Bespopovtsi.

The Popovtsi, who are the closest to the Russian Orthodox Church, maintain a church hierarchy and uphold the leading role of the priests in church affairs. The Beglopopovtsi (literally, "of fugitive priests") were so called because they accepted priests who went over to them from the Orthodox Church. They represented an early form of Raskol (Dissension) and are at present insignificant in number.

The Bespopovtsi (literally "priestless") were the most radical section of the Old Believers. They were also the most fanatical and the most intolerant of all who thought differently. In their teaching the Bespopovtsi went the farthest of all Old Believers from the Orthodox Church. They rejected priests and replaced them with elders and lay readers.

The Old Believers' sects in the USSR have no single ecclesiastical governing body and are run separately. Old Believers' churches are to be found in the central areas of Russia, in the Ukraine, Byelorussia, Moldavia and the Baltic Republics.

Various Old Believers' Churches periodically hold conferences, congresses and councils.

Religious Jews in the USSR perform their rites in 180 synagogues and several dozens of minyans. There are synagogues in most large cities, including Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Minsk, Riga, Vilnius, Tashkent, Tbilisi, Baku, Sverdlovsk, Lvov and Odessa.

Sociological studies show that the degree of religiousness varies among different ethnic groups of Jews, being higher among the Georgian and Bukhara (Central Asian) Jews, and also among Jews from the mountainous regions in the Caucasus. The believers in these groups observe the customs and

rites prescribed by the Jewish faith much more strictly than other Jews.

Religious Jews enjoy the same rights as citizens of all other nationalities and creeds. The synagogues have all the necessary facilities for baking matzoh; a yeshiva functions under the Moscow Synagogue; an annual calendar is published and also other religious literature.

Like all the people of our country, religious Jews approve and support the Soviet Government's policy on religious freedom. Yakov Fishman, Rabbi of the Moscow Choral Synagogue, said at a press conference: "I can state in all responsibility that believing Jews in the Soviet Union enjoy complete freedom of religion. No one has prevented us, and no one is allowed to prevent us from praying in our synagogues and performing religious rites. Many synagogues have mikvas (baths for ritual ablutions) and matzoh bakeries. The synagogue, which stands in the centre of the Soviet capital, is in excellent condition. Foreign guests have praised it very highly."

"We who profess Judaism," Yakov Fishman said, "are conscious in our daily lives that the Soviet Government safeguards the rights of believers." Persons infringing the rights of believers may have criminal proceedings taken against them. The law obliges government officials to investigate immediately complaints and appeals from believers and strictly forbids any restriction on religious grounds of citizens' rights.

A believer by the name of Sluch, a representative of the Birobidjan synagogue, stated: "As a Soviet citizen I affirm that Jews in the USSR do not need the protection of the Zionists... It was Soviet government that gave Jews, who were persecuted in Tsarist Russia, full civil rights."

All religious centres are completely independent, in full conformity with the principle of the separation of the Church from the State, in deciding matters of church life.

The Council for Religious Affairs

The Council for Religious Affairs under the Council of Ministers of the USSR was organized in 1965, incorporating the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults. It was entrusted with exercising control over the observance of the law with regard to religious denominations, both by government agencies and church organizations, and with assisting religious organizations in their international relations.

The Council for Religious Affairs under the Council of Ministers of the USSR considers and takes decisions within its terms of reference on matters concerned with the activity of religious organizations in the USSR and acts in a liaison capacity between the Government and religious organizations in any question that may arise requiring government approval.

The Council for Religious Affairs has authorized representatives in the Union and Autonomous Republics, territories and regions, who advise the Council and also republic and local government bodies and other organizations in a republic, territory or region on religious matters. They consider applications and complaints and settle, within their terms of reference, questions related to the activity of religious organizations.

These representatives work in close co-operation with republican, territorial and regional government bodies, which are assisted by commissions,

acting as public bodies, that help to exercise control over the observance of legislation on religious affairs.

The activity of these public commissions serves as one of the important guarantees of freedom of conscience in the USSR.

The Law and the Church

The legislative guarantees of freedom of conscience in the USSR are being further developed and improved. A Decree of the Presidium of the RSFSR Supreme Soviet of June 23, 1975, amended and supplemented the decree of the Soviet Government of April 8, 1929, which constituted the basic act "On Religious Associations". This was done to bring the basic act into conformity with legislation passed between 1929 and 1974, and to discard obsolete provisions, concepts and terms.

What specific amendments and additions were made to the 1929 act? Special provision was made to authorize religious centres and diocesan administrations to manufacture religious articles and objects of worship and to sell them to religious associations. All religious associations, at both central and local level, were authorized to acquire means of transportation and to rent, build or purchase premises for their needs.

A religious association or a group of believers may engage in their activities only upon registration with the appropriate government authority. In so registering, a religious association undertakes to abide by the relevant legislation and at the same time then enjoys the protection of the law safeguarding freedom of conscience. Registration of religious associations is therefore in the interests of both the believers and the State.

In this connection, one of the new provisions is of considerable importance. It stipulates that registration and deregistration of religious associations and the opening and closure of houses of worship are matters for decision not by local authorities, as was the case in the 1929 law, but by the national agency, the Council for Religious Affairs under the Council of Ministers of the USSR.

Several articles of the new legislation emphasize the principle of centralization in the control of observance of the law on religious matters; accordingly, the Council for Religious Affairs has been given extensive powers. It supervises the enforcement by central and local organizations and officials of the legislation on religion, is authorized to pronounce on matters of religion and the Church to government ministries, departments and other organizations, and it has a number of other prerogatives in addition.

It should be stressed that the new legislation reaffirms the special legal provisions which protect the legitimate rights of believers, religious associations and ministers. These provisions make it an offence to interfere with the performance of religious rites when they do not disturb public order and do not encroach on the rights of citizens. Any discrimination of believers or infringement of their freedom of conscience is strictly prohibited. A decision of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation of March 18, 1966, and similar rulings in other Union Republics make it explicit that refusal to employ a person or to admit him to an educational establishment, dismissal from work or an educational institution, or deprivation of legitimate benefits and privileges, or any other limitation of citizens' rights on religious grounds, are punishable by law.

To illustrate, in a recent case in the city of Alma Ata, a woman manager of a furniture-design office, by the name of Makaryeva, attempted to dismiss an accounts worker who had been baptized, under the pretext of staff reduction. The believer appealed to the local Soviet of Working People's Deputies. Her rights were upheld, while Makaryeva lost her position and had to answer in court to a criminal charge.

Soviet law prohibits the closure of churches which are supported by the population. Such closures did take place in the past. At present, also, some over-zealous officials may raise the question of closing a house of worship because of the opinion of the majority of the residents of the locality where the house of worship operates. This is a wrong approach. The final decision on the closure of a church or of any house of worship rests with the Council for Religious Affairs under the Council of Ministers of the USSR which considers the matter on the representation of the executive committee of the local Soviet of Working People's Deputies and the Council of Ministers of the Union or Autonomous Republic. This procedure, where the question is examined very thoroughly at various levels and is finally settled by the highest body at national level, helps to avoid mistakes and guarantees observance of the law with regard to religious denominations and freedom of conscience.

The law strictly defines the procedure and legitimate grounds for deregistering religious societies and closing houses of worship. There are three reasons for deregistering a religious association: 1) serious infringement of the legislation on religious denominations; 2) non-observance of the terms of agreements with local government bodies; 3) disbandment of the association.

The closure of houses of worship is allowed in only two cases: 1) if the religious association making use of the house of worship has been deregistered; 2) if the building must be pulled down because of reconstruction of the village or town or because of the buildings' dilapidated condition.

In the second case the believers may be allotted another building for the purposes of worship or may employ their legitimate right to rent premises which meet the necessary building requirements.

Here are examples of legitimate deregistrations of religious associations and closure of churches.

The religious community in the village of Dolgoye in Zolotukhin District of Kursk Region was registered in 1946. The Executive Committee of the District Soviet of Working People's Deputies made over a church building to the society under an agreement. In recent years more and more believers had been leaving the church and finally only a few founding members remained. There were no new members, donations from the believers ceased and the religious community as such ceased to exist. The church property was handed over to a neighbouring church two kilometres away where the remaining small group of believers from the village of Dolgoye began to go. The disintegrated association was deregistered by decision of the Council for Religious Affairs.

A Lutheran community was registered in Bauska District of the Latvian Republic in 1948 and had the free use of a church building. In recent years the church had been attended by only a small number of believers, and in 1975 they passed a unanimous decision at a meeting to consider their church as having terminated its activity.

The Russian Orthodox church in the village of Stefanpol, Miory District, Vitebsk Region of the

Byelorussian Republic, had been receiving very little in the way of donations. In 1973 the priest had to leave the parish because the community had no means of supporting him. The church building had not been repaired for lack of funds and became dilapidated to the point that a technical commission ruled that it should be pulled down. Of the religious community there remained only a small group of believers who went to a neighbouring church to worship. The association was deregistered since it had disintegrated, and the church building was pulled down as a hazardous structure.

In the city of Orel the registered society of Evangelical Christians-Baptists had a house of worship which was located within the city reconstruction zone and was scheduled to be pulled down in accordance with the development plan for the city. By ruling of the Executive Committee of the City Soviet of Working People's Deputies, the society was given, in place of the old house of prayer, a building of the same size within city limits, which could be constructed for the purposes of worship.

At the same time, cases have occurred where local authorities have acted in contravention of the law with regard to the Church and believers. For instance, M. Sopich, chairman of a village Soviet in Sumy Region, the Ukrainian Republic, illegally prohibited a priest newly appointed by the bishop from assuming his duties. In another case the local authorities at the town of Prokhladny, Kabardino-Balkarskaya Autonomous Republic, prohibited requiem services on Remembrance Day. In both cases the persons responsible were brought before the court and sentenced as provided for by the law.

May children be taught religion?

Soviet legislation permits religious education of children on a private basis, i.e., in the family. The

law on religious denominations does not ban children, accompanied by their parents, from attending churches, services and the performance of religious rites. Thus the law does not prohibit teaching religion to children, subject to certain rules.

All Union Republics now have codes of laws on marriage, the family and guardianship stipulating parents' rights and duties in bringing up their children until they are of age. The codes state that father and mother have equal rights and obligations in matters concerning the upbringing of their children. This means that any religious rites in respect of minors may be performed, only the consent of the parents or guardian being required. The consent of both parents is necessary.

Soviet legislation on religious matters prohibits any charitable activity by the Church. Why?

Above all, because such activity is not directly related to the performance of religious rites. Neither is there any practical need for such activity. Poverty, famine and unemployment have long been done away with in the Soviet Union. The socialist state undertakes responsibility for social security, for providing leisure and recreational facilities for the workers, and for the cultural development of the people. As has been reaffirmed in the resolutions of the 25th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, one of the principal tasks of the State is to further improve the well-being of the Soviet people, continuing to raise their standard of living and improve working conditions, and promoting rapid progress in the field of public health and in the educational and cultural spheres.

Protection of the rights of Soviet citizens and further strengthening of the law in this respect is a major condition for the advancement of socialist

democracy. Ensuring observance of the law on religious matters in keeping with the Leninist principles of the correct attitude to adopt toward religion and believers comes directly under this heading.

Are There Religious "Martyrs" in the Soviet Union?

No state in the world is indifferent to a violation of its laws or generally accepted norms under the guise of religion.

Soviet law regulates relations between the Church and the State and clearly defines the rights of the Church and of believers. Legislative acts prohibit: the use of believers' meetings for making political statements against the interests of the Soviet State; the incitement of believers to evade the fulfilment of their civic duties and not to participate in social and political life; the performance of cruel rites which are harmful to the health of citizens, and frauds perpetrated with the object of playing on superstition (such as spreading rumours about "the end of the world" and of "miraculous healings" or "happenings" at so-called "holy places", staging such "healings", etc.). Religious bodies are not entitled to make contributions from believers compulsory.

The clergy in the USSR for the most part honestly abide by the demands of the law. But every family has its black sheep. From time to time there are cases of extremists of various sorts among spiritual leaders or their followers, who have to be brought to book for breaking the law. However, Soviet legislation has never had a single ruling prescribing punishment for religious (or any other)

beliefs. The only people who are brought to justice are those who violate Soviet law or incite others to do so.

Certain persons try to circumvent the law, and to incite discontent among believers with the policy of the Soviet State in religious matters; they pursue aims that are usually careerist and dictated by self-interest, under the guise of religion. This is mostly the case in sectarian groups (such as Jehovah's witnesses, Pentecostalists and a few others) which are also notorious for practising cruel rites harmful to the health and well-being of their members.

Certain leaders of sectarian groups, seeking to maintain their hold over believers, forbid them to take part in social life, to attend cultural and educational centres, to listen to the radio and read newspapers, and to apply to doctors for medical assistance, and they sometimes attempt to persuade believers to refuse to serve in the Soviet Army. All these actions are violations of Soviet law, encroachments on the rights and obligations of Soviet citizens. The Soviet State has no option but to bring such law-breakers to justice. But these are the characters that reactionary propaganda lauds as "heroes" of a certain mythical "religious front" who have "suffered" for their religious beliefs.

Georgi Vins is one such "religious martyr". His case was heard at the Kiev Regional Court and it was established that the accused had incited believers to illegal acts, to the violation of Soviet law relating to religious organizations. Vins waxed rich on the donations of gullible believers, concealed the real size of his income and evaded taxation. A fatal accident involving a soldier by the name of Ivan Moiseyev figured prominently in the Vins case. While bathing in the Sea of Azov in June, 1972, in full view of numerous bathers, Moiseyev drowned.

All attempts to resuscitate him were in vain despite the efforts of doctors from a nearby holiday-home and of the first-aid service. The legal investigation certified death by accidental drowning.

However, Vins fabricated a faked photograph showing alleged "traces of torture" and "mortal wounds" inflicted on Moiseyev, and began secretly preparing "bulletins" and "brotherly leaflets" spreading malicious slander among the members of his sect against the Soviet Army and the Soviet government.

Vins alleged in his writings that Soviet Army officers, incensed by Baptist Moiseyev's "refusal to conform", "stabbed him to death" and took his body in a car labelled "Pravda" to the sea and dumped it in the water. This was allegedly done in broad daylight, in front of numerous eyewitnesses!

Semyon Moiseyev, Ivan's brother, said that shortly before his death Ivan wrote in his notebook: "The order of the state is to go out to sea and return! Christ's order is to go out to sea and not to return!" Who had passed on God's order to Moiseyev?

Semyon Moiseyev wrote in his letter to the Council for Religious Affairs under the Council of Ministers of the USSR that Ivan Moiseyev's death had been brought about by Vins and his "helpers" and that it was the culmination of a "prolonged and thorough preparation carried out by the members of the sect". They wanted to make a great martyr out of him, to glorify him as one "slain for Christ" and to denigrate the Soviet socialist order.

In some cases the leaders of sectarian groups attempt to force believers to abstain from taking part in elections to Soviet government bodies, to refuse to receive official documents, including passports, or to destroy them, to refuse to serve in the Soviet

Army on the grounds that they are already "soldiers of the most pious army" and that to desert from the ranks of that "army" would bring down divine punishment.

In some sects, such as the Pentecostalists, Khlysts and a few others, cruel rites are practised. These include compulsory debilitating fasts and the holding of prayer meetings in conditions of great nervous excitement, exaltation and fanaticism, often causing grave psychic derangement among the believers.

The group known as the Baptist "initiativists" has been guilty of serious infringements of the law on religious matters. The leaders of this group, which came into being in 1960, had sought to sow discontent among the believers with the Soviet law relating to religious organizations. The "initiativists" proclaimed themselves the spiritual centre for all Evangelical Christians-Baptists and demanded the removal of the legitimately operating religious centre, the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists. It was explained to the "initiativists" that, according to the law, the question of the leadership of a religious organization is decided by the believers themselves and that government bodies are not entitled to interfere in this matter.

The leaders of the dissenting group then began to disseminate leaflets, letters and appeals slandering the Soviet State and its policy in religious matters and distorting the meaning of the legislation on religious organizations. The "initiativists" attempted to hold prayer meetings in public places, in offices, parks, gardens and even in buses and trams.

A secretly circulated sheet of these breakaway Baptists called on the believers strictly to abide by these commandments: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world", "Under no cir-

cumstances allow, even in thought, the possibility of using a television set, going to a cinema, to theatres, etc".

These actions of the Baptist "initiativists" were severely censured by public opinion. Local government bodies and public organizations patiently explained to them the inadmissibility of their illegal activities. Most of the believers who had been drawn into the group realized that they were being misled by their fanatical leaders and broke with them. But some of the leaders were deaf to all explanations, and after all persuasive measures had failed they were brought to justice. Not for their religious beliefs, but for specific violations of the law.

For instance, the People's Court heard a case of Baptist "initiativists" who had set up an underground printing press near Riga where various material was printed, slandering the government's policy vis-à-vis the Church and inciting believers to defy the laws of the country. It should be noted that this sectarian group secretly received the latest printing equipment from its patrons in the United States. It was brought into the country in separate lots to different addresses. One sample of the literature printed with this equipment was a libel entitled "May All Be One". This made the monstrous assertion that the aim of the Soviet State was the physical annihilation of all believers.

The organizers of this unlawful activity had to be brought to justice, not for their religious beliefs, but for inciting people to anti-Soviet activity, and for their illegal printing enterprise.

A court in Vilnius tried the case of a man called Kovalev who published a sheet slandering the Soviet system. This was done under the guise of being a "chronicle of the Roman-Catholic Church in Lithuania".

A person by the name of Voloshin organized a sect whose members he urged to defy Soviet laws. He made them refuse government pensions and allowances, and refrain from seeking the help of doctors when they were ill. One woman who was under the influence of this obscurantist died of pneumonia because she refused to see a doctor. Voloshin resorted to physical violence to command the total obedience of the sect members. In the words of his 15-year old daughter, Dina, he did not allow her, her 13-year old sister Elizaveta and 12-year old brother Ilya to go to school, and they never did. "Father beats us severely on every pretext," said Dina. "When he learned that I had trimmed my hair he took my sister and me to a prayer meeting where he beat me; he choked me by the throat until I bled from the mouth and nose. There were about seven people there... they began to cut my hair, and I cried terribly; I thought my father was going to choke me to death. Somehow I broke loose and ran out into the street with my sister... I will never go back to my mother either—or, still worse, to Voloshin—and I will not live with them. I want to go to school like the other girls, and I will never live with mother and the fanatic Voloshin."

Voloshin was put on trial for his criminal acts.

Soviet justice has always fought criminal offenders and will continue to do so. No one is allowed to make use of his religious beliefs to evade his civic duties, to violate social order or to encroach on the rights of other citizens. Every Soviet citizen is obliged to abide by the laws of the State, to discharge his public obligations, and respect the rules governing socialist society.

Attempts to conduct illegal activities under the guise of religion are not tolerated by the Soviet

people, including believers. For example, the parishioners of St. Nikita Church in the Orekhovo-Zuyevo District of the Moscow Region rejected the services of a priest by the name of Dudko and expelled him from their church for his anti-social sermons.

What did this "shepherd" preach from the pulpit? "When they sent us this priest," said E. Kharitonova, chairman of the church executive body, "we didn't want to accept him as we had heard that he had already been chased out of two churches. But we were assured that Dudko had repented. We were convinced by what they told us, so we signed an employment contract with him. At first he carried out his duties as he should. But then he began to get to work with his sermons. As we listened we realized something was not right. He would start about religious things, then pass on to worldly matters. He said that flying to the cosmos was wrong because this caused believers on earth to choke. And he said that the atheists had confused themselves and were confusing the believers; that the communists were only interested in money and their careers, and not in any ideals. He warned that the end of the world was coming. You see, young people seldom come to church. Sometimes young relatives come to a burial service, and that's about all. Then young people began telling us that our holy father was not leading us the right way. They didn't have to tell us, as we could see for ourselves. Believers or non-believers, we're all Soviet people. Now what was Dudko driving at? He was only blackening our country and he did it very subtly and maliciously too."

Dudko's preachings went far beyond the bounds of religion. In his slander of the position of the Church in the USSR and the policy of the Commun-

ist Party and the Soviet State in matters connected with religion and the Church, Dudko was hand in glove with foreign reactionary circles hostile to the Soviet country and striving to stir up anti-Soviet sentiments.

Another "great martyr" was the Orthodox priest, Yakunin, who was debarred by the Patriarch from church service for unseemly activities and breach of church discipline in 1966. "We see in Yakunin, not a shepherd of God, but a criminal who uses God's temple as a source of material enrichment without labour, not of spiritual enrichment. Why did Yakunin become a priest? For profit, and to sow discord. He was all the time calculating the value of ikons and church property. Knowing the story of Yakunin's life, one cannot by any stretch of the imagination call him a 'great martyr'. He is a swindler and we ask to be protected from this character," wrote the parishioners of the Church of "The Joy Unexpected" in Moscow.

A Natural Process

The radical economic, political and ideological changes in the country during Soviet years, the mass participation of the population in the building of a communist society, the achievements of the Soviet people in science, engineering and the conquest of space, the rising cultural level of the people—all this has brought about fundamental changes in the outlook of Soviet people.

Their move away from religion, of course, is not a process peculiar to socialist countries only. All over the world religion and the Church are undergoing a deep ideological crisis, "which is shattering their age-long concepts and existing structures", as

was pointed out at the 1969 International Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties.

The crisis in religion is often commented on by foreign religious leaders. For instance, Pope Paul VI observed in his encyclical, "Ecclesiam suam", that profound crisis phenomena were rocking the modern Roman-Catholic Church like ocean waves. In his speech at the 4th Synod of Bishops of the Roman-Catholic Church in 1974, Cardinal Joseph Cordeiro said that the process of secularization was a global phenomenon. He observed that atheism was penetrating everywhere, and that millions of people throughout the world were professed atheists.

Such revelations clearly reflect real facts and processes. For example, in the Vienna newspaper, *Neue Kronen-Zeitung,* it was stated that in Austria 24,174 people had broken away from officially recognized Churches during 1974, of whom 20,816 were from the Roman-Catholic Church.

It is symptomatic that not only ordinary church members but also clergymen are abandoning the Church. The Polish newspaper, *Zycie Warszawy,* reported that each year the number of Catholic priests throughout the world is reduced by 2,000 and that in the last seven years 14,000 priests had returned to secular life.

These eloquent testimonies of the decline of religion are not exceptional. The chief reason for this is undoubtedly the inexorable progress of history, the immense social changes that have taken place in the last half century.

In view of the radical social changes that have been effected in our country it is not surprising that the decline of religion has been much more marked in the USSR than in other countries.

Religion is a complex social phenomenon with deep roots in man's cognition of the mysteries of

life. Admonition, prohibition and administrative pressure are worthless in the struggle against religious ideology.

The founders of Marxism-Leninism repeatedly pointed out that it is wrong to employ violent, discriminatory or administrative means in the struggle against religion. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union has always adhered to the Marxist-Leninist teaching with regard to religion, the Church and believers. It has always been the policy of the Soviet Communist Party and the Soviet State in relation to religion and the Church to refrain from exerting administrative pressure on believers and to respect their beliefs and their legitimate rights.

The True Position

Answering a question of a Novosti Press Agency correspondent about the position of believers in the USSR, Patriarch Pimen, Metropolitan of Moscow and All Russia, said: "Freedom of religion is guaranteed by the basic law, the Constitution of the USSR. All religious associations, including the Russian Orthodox Church, are equal in the eyes of the State and each is self-governed. No official records or statistics are kept in the USSR with regard to private religious belief. No one is questioned about his religious beliefs or affiliations when applying for a job or a passport, and not even during census-taking. Soviet legislation strictly prohibits any infringement of the civil rights of believers. All believers, including the clergy, are equal citizens of the Soviet State, and take an active part in the political, economic and social life of the country."

Numerous foreign guests have observed (and this includes clergymen, believers and atheists) that believers in our country have every opportunity for

the full practice of their religion.

"There is no doubt that the Russian Orthodox Church is at present developing quite freely and receives great attention of the Soviet State," said Archimandrite Cyprianos, Dean of the Church of St.Nicholas in Alexandria.

"We have heard sermons in many Soviet churches and houses of worship and have seen that they preach the Christian virtues, love of one's neighbour, and a will for peace and good relations among people. We studied the training of priests in the USSR and found that it is well organized. We have met not only our brethren in Christ but also leaders of Jewish communities. We are convinced of their well-being," said Dr. Robert Marshall, head of a delegation of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA.

In his interview with a Novosti Press Agency correspondent, Dato Haji Ismail Bin Punjag Arissa, General Secretary of the People's Council for Islamic Affairs of Malaysia, said, in particular: "We are convinced that you have freedom of faith. The believers worship in full freedom. The holy places are maintained in good repair. We have met believers and talked to them. They express their opinion freely."

"The Soviet Union can be proud of its achievements in science, technology, medicine and art," said the Right Reverend Colin O'Brien Winter, Bishop of Damaraland in Namibia, "but it can take special pride in the social equality between nations and races attained by the Soviet people. When we attended a service in the St. Vladimir Cathedral, and then in the church of the Convent of Intercession, and watched Soviet citizens pray, we saw no discrimination."

Statements such as these testify to the fact that in the Soviet Union the principle of freedom of faith is not a formal declaration but living reality.

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В. Куроедов
РЕЛИГИЯ И ЦЕРКОВЬ В СССР
на английском языке

Vladimir Alexeyevich KUROYEDOV was born in 1906 in the village of Zadvorka, Voskresensky District, Gorky Region. He graduated from the Gorky Teachers' College in 1930 and has been a member of the Soviet Communist Party since 1936. He began work as a teacher in 1927. He held leading Party and government posts in the Gorky Region, then worked as science editor of the newspaper **Sovetskaya Rossiya.** Since 1960 he has been in charge, first, of the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church under the Council of Ministers of the USSR, and subsequently of the Council for Religious Affairs under the Council of Ministers of the USSR.

Vladimir Kuroyedov is the author of several books, and has written about the policy of the Soviet Communist Party and the State in regard to religion and the Church, legislation with reference to religious bodies, and the present situation of religion in the USSR.